## Panamint Valley Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)

### RMA/RECREATION MANAGEMENT ZONE (RMZ) OBJECTIVE(S) DECISIONS

#### **SRMA RMZ**

- 1. Nadeau Road Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 2. Escape Trail Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 3. Isham Canyon Trail Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 4. Fish Canyon Trail Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 5. Jack Pot Canyon Trail Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 6. Jail Canyon Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 7. Stone Canyon Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 8. South Park Canyon Loop Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 9. Minietta Mine Road Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 10. Pleasant Canyon Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 11. Goler Wash Road Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)
- 12. Surprise Canyon Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)

## For All RMZ's:

**Objective Statement**: The objective is to designate this area as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) this includes northern Searles Valley, Slate Range, all of Panamint Valley, and non-wilderness portions of the Argus and Panamint Mountains. Continue to provide outstanding recreational environments that focuses on low to high impact multi use recreation along with the enhancement of primitive and dispersed recreation that serve multiple publics. The goal is to maintain, sustain, and protect the broad range of recreational uses and special recreation permitted events ranging from technical 4 wheel drive touring that takes specially equipped motorized vehicles exploring historic areas to horsebacking to simple or arduous hiking adventures.

**Activities:** The primary activities for the Panamint SRMA are rugged backcountry motor vehicle 4 wheel drive touring, primarily by specially equipped jeeps but also accessed by experienced

operators of dual sport bikes and hikers. Other main activities are rock hounding, hunting, equestrian riding, photography, spiritual retreats, climbing, and mountain biking. The area supports many large group events each year under special recreation permits, their names and events are as follows: California 4 Wheel Drive Association's Panamint Valley Days which is a 5-day extreme jeep touring event that started in 1985, guiding and educating new members about old mine site features. The tours offer separate canyons each day to up to see. These RMZ canyon trails are as follows: Nadeau Road, Escape Trail, Isham Canyon Trail, Fish Canyon Trail, Jack Pot Canyon Trail, Jail Canyon Trail, Stone Canyon Trail, South Park Canyon Loop Trail, Pleasant Canyon Trail, and Goler Wash Road all taking a four-wheel drive vehicle to access most of the sites, Equestrian Trails Incorporated's Death Valley Equestrian Ride that has been going on for over 50 years starting in Ridgecrest and ending up in Death Valley, 3 annual American Motorcycle Association District 37 dual sport events, and Wilderness Torah Passover Celebrations in Surprise Canyon.

**Experiences:** This SRMA provides a place to escape to for a real weekend adventure, whether it be grinding your vehicle up a challenging and rugged jeep trail, rock climbing one of the granite faces in Great Falls Basin, urging a horse over the Slates and Panamints on an 80-mile ride from Ridgecrest to Death Valley, hunters flush out chukar from well-watered canyons in the Argus, picking over cobbles in a desert wash, photographing historic mine sites in the area, following an old mining foot trails, or backpacking up Surprise Canyon to Panamint City.

**Benefits:** Individuals, families, and friends from outside the area seek out the SRMA to get away from cities and the stresses and pressures of urban life. The most active use season extends from October through May. Over just one of five busy holiday weekends that occur during this period, up to 2,500 people may come out to this SRMA alone to camp and explore. Annually, as many as 35,000 people may visit this SRMA each year.

Locals from Trona and Homewood Canyon use these places more casually, to wind down when they get off work. The Slates and Argus Range are viewed as extensions of these residents' own backyards. Great Falls Basin in particular works this way for Trona residents. It is the family picnic and party place of choice. It is less than 5 miles away from the community and directly accessible by dirt roads soresidents can use off-road vehicles to get there. The area is particularly inviting to residents in the spring time when the water is still flowing and the weather is getting hotter.

More generally, the Panamint SRMA functions as the destination of choice for the more experienced desert visitors. It is harsh, dry, unforgiving rugged country, starkly beautiful, and remote. The area is beyond the reach of cell phones. Most locations are more than 50 miles from any support services. Visitors need to come prepared, with extra gas, good maps, and plenty of water. A reliable, high clearance, 4-wheel drive vehicle is required for nearly all

vehicle routes in the area. Many people, particularly those intending to explore some of the more extreme jeep trails, choose to come here in large groups, caravanning and camping together, both for safety and companionship. Others seek isolated places to camp and explore on their own. They are more interested in a wilderness-type experience that is readily accessible by vehicle. Fortunately, the SRMA is large enough to absorb and accommodate both kinds of people.

This SRMA is one of the last places left that has not been thoroughly explored and written about. Here it is still possible to find something that no one or very few other people have found. And there are so many things to be discovered! There are many abandoned trails and old mine sites, impenetrable-seeming canyons, slivers of seeps, springs, and riparian areas. The area is vast and rich in topographical relief. The views can be outstanding. Every trip can be a new adventure. Each provides yet another opportunity to hone one's backcountry skills and deepen one's knowledge of the area. One can pursue technical driving, mining history, blank spots on the map, and cross-country route finding. This can be intoxicating both for individuals and for small groups of committed friends and family. It may explain why so many of the visitors to Panamint Valley are repeat visitors.

Most of the SRMA is too remote to contribute much to the local economies of Ridgecrest and Trona, although it may contribute substantially to business at Panamint Springs. Most people visiting the area are well stocked with supplies before they leave home. They may gas up locally and eat out on their way to and from the area, but for the duration of their stay, they are mostly self-sufficient and by necessity, camping out.

The area is very pristine, providing excellent habitat for many sensitive and endemic T&E species including Inyo California towhee, desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, Nelsons bighorn sheep, bats, Panamint alligator lizard, and Panamint daisy, among others.

## Nadeau Road Recreation Management Zone (RMZ)

This Special Recreation Management Zone is a 19<sup>th</sup> century freight and stage route developed by a French-Canadian immigrant and person of historical significance, Remi Nadeau. It was one of three principal routes developed by Nadeau to resupply mines in the Upper Mojave Desert and Owens Valley and to transfer bullion from these mines, most notably from Cerro Gordo, south to the emerging city of Los Angeles. The RMZ encompasses the longest, continuous stretch of intact Nadeau Road still open and available to the public. The original two-track, now a primitive jeep trail, can be driven nearly continuously from an overnight watering site known as the "Tanks" in northern Searles Valley, back and forth over Slate Range Crossing, down and north along the Argus Range up the entire length of Panamint Valley. The trail provides access to many historic mining sites in the area and to many wilderness trail heads.

The trail and its associated features are likely to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. These features include a Chinese road building camp and several impressive examples of stone road construction, such as the "Chinese Wall" at Slate Range Crossing, crumbling roads over Ash Hill, or the bypass routes around dry waterfalls in Stone Canyon. Other associated features include the Reilly town site (Anthony Mill Ruins), the stage stop near Ballarat, Panamint City, mine sites in Shepherd, Revenue, Snow, Thompson, and Stone Canyons, and in particular, the Golden Lady, George, Minnietta and Modoc mines, and Lookout City. At the height of his activity, Nadeau ran several large mule teams pulling 2-3 wagons each, every day up and down his trail system, providing relief wagons and mule teams at relay stops along the way, to keep the goods flowing. The Nadeau Road provided the only reliable means to conduct business, sustain commerce, and expand development. Today, Remi Nadeau and the Nadeau Road are widely attributed with the growth and development not only of the Owens Valley and significant portions of the Upper Mojave Desert, but of Los Angeles itself.

**Objective Statement:** To manage and protect the nominated Nadeau Road National Recreation Trail as a highly valued historical resource open for recreational motorized and non-motorized use and interpretative purposes. Also include, managing for outstanding motorized and non-motorized historic touring opportunities along the longest intact and scenic stretch of original Nadeau Road.

The longest uninterrupted stretch of the historic Nadeau Road is located along the east side of the Argus Mountains in Panamint Valley. It exists here much as it did in the mid-1880's, as a primitive two-track, with side vehicle routes and foot and equestrian trails to all of the principal early mining sites in the area. The Nadeau Road across Searles Valley and up the length of Panamint Valley is one of three routes developed in the region by mule skinner and freight operator, Remi Nadeau, a figure of historical significance in the development of the region and the city of Los Angeles. Nadeau used the freight routes he developed, including routes to such major silver-producing areas as Darwin and Cerro Gordo, to resupply mines in the area and to deliver bullion to the emerging city of Los Angeles. The route through Panamint Valley supported mining activities in both the Argus and Panamint ranges, most notably at Panamint City, Reilly, in Shepherd, Revenue, Snow and Stone canyons (i.e., the Minnietta and Modoc mines), and at Lookout City. Many of these mines sites are exceptionally well-preserved and include several very old rock features (corrals and stone ruins) in addition to shafts and adits, as well as intact standing structures (cabins, head frames, loading docks, tram supports and cables). The trail offers unparalleled opportunities to explore, understand, and experience the past.

**Activities:** Motor vehicle touring, packing, hiking, camping, rock collecting and photography. **Experiences:** Backcountry vehicle touring and exploration of historic mining sites, primitive

camping, unique outdoor adventures shared by family and friends, and access to designated wilderness. Wilderness provides additional opportunities to experience naturalness, wildness, self-reliance, and primitive and unconfined (non-motorized) recreation.

**Benefits:** *Personal:* An enjoyment of local scenery, geology, mining history, increased health and fitness, and participation in family activities and activities with friends.

*Community/Social:* Increased tourism and revenue for the local economy. Greater community ownership and stewardship of desert resources.

*Environmental:* Protect the cultural, natural and visual resource while providing recreation opportunities.

## **RMZ # 2-12:**

**Objective Statement:** To manage for Special Recreation Permitted (SRP) Events and Technical Driving Routes and for the sustainability of providing outstanding technical and semi-non-technical vehicle exploration opportunities along designated routes listed above that use specially equipped motorized vehicles to access certain historical mining areas. Along with preserving special recreation permitted activities that focus on visiting these historic mining encampments by way of specially equipped vehicles while educating users about outdoor recreation integrity and responsibility, stewardship, and educating the users about the mining history of this area. In addition to the above, this RMZ should reserve the value of the environment and improve multiple use recreation for all future generations.

**Supporting Information:** This Special Recreation Management Area stems around the mining history of the Nadeau Road, Ballarat, Stone Canyon, Lookout City, Jackpot Canyon, Jail Canyon, Panamint Springs, Panamint City, back door access to Darwin, South Park Canyon, Pleasant Valley Canyon, Defense Mine, Barker Ranch, Minietta Mine, and the historic mining sites of the area. These mining encampments supplied mining materials such as gold and silver down these Canyon routes to distribute to major cities such as Los Angeles.

The RMZ encompasses Panamint Valley SRMA and provides access to many historic mining sites found along aggressive canyon routes that take specialized vehicles and special skill to access some of the mining dead-end sites and other routes supply access to many wilderness trailheads.

**Activities:** Motor vehicle touring, technical jeeping, four-wheel drive education, dual sport events, equestrian endurance rides, back packing, hiking, camping, rock collecting, religious camp celebrations, and photography.

**Experiences:** Rugged backcountry vehicle touring and exploration of historic mining sites, primitive camping, unique outdoor adventures shared by family and friends, and access to designated wilderness.

**Benefits:** *Personal:* An enjoyment of local scenery, geology, mining history, increased health and fitness, and participation in family activities and activities with friends.

*Community/Social:* Increased tourism and revenue for the local economy. Greater community ownership and stewardship of desert resources.

*Environmental:* Protect the cultural, natural and visual resource while providing special recreation permitted opportunities.

### **RECREATION SETTING CHARACTERISTICS (RSC) DESCRIPTIONS**

## **For All RMZ:**

**Physical Components**: The area is one of the most remote and undeveloped large areas within the Ridgecrest Field Office. It encompasses more than 125,000 acres, of which only a little more than 30,000 acres (roughly 25%) is accessible to most people. The remainder is comprised of ephemeral wetlands and extremely rugged, mountainous terrain where vehicle access is limited to primitive jeep trails.

The network of exceptional scenic, primitive jeep trails is one of the areas principal attractions. Several of these jeep trails are historic in nature, following the alleged wagon route of the ill-fated Manly Party in 1849 in the case of the Escape Trail, or of Remi Nadeau's principal 19<sup>th</sup> century mining supply and transport route along the length of Panamint Valley, in the case of the Nadeau Road, as well as terminating in many historic mining sites. Several are extremely challenging and test the skill of drivers to safely negotiate, i.e., Isham and Fish canyons in the Slates; Jackpot Canyon, Pleasant Canyon, Middle Park and the South Park Canyon Loop, and Goler Wash in the Panamints; Snow, Thompson, and Osborne canyons, and routes specifically to the Minietta Mine, Lookout City, and the Defense Mine in the Argus Range. Historic mining trails provide for foot and equestrian access to historic sites off of the designated vehicle route system.

The area also encompasses several superlative natural features, including the extreme topography of three different mountain ranges, Panamint Dry Lake, and up to a dozen dramatic, deep canyons filled with perennial streams, water falls, and thick riparian areas. Panamint Dry Lake encompasses a unique constellation of desert wetland communities, including mesquite bosques, freshwater springs, and freshwater & saltwater marshes. These areas provide prime stop-over and wintering habitats for migratory birds, as well as important

nesting sites for resident birds. When filled with water, the shallow lake offers outstanding reflections of the surrounding mountains. Surprise Canyon is now the premiere hiking and backpacking venue in the area. The canyon contains the largest perennial stream and riparian area in the entire Panamint Range. Some of its more exceptional features include several freshwater springs, a large, cascading waterfall, and foot access to Panamint City, a 19<sup>th</sup> century mining town, deep within Death Valley National Park.

While visitors use these rugged jeep trails and hike to visit as much of the area as possible, visitors tend to congregate and camp in just a few select locations, principally at Great Falls Basin, at Ballarat (private property) and along the Indian Ranch, Happy Canyon, and Surprise Canyon roads up to Chris Wicht Camp, and along the Onyx Mine and Minnietta Mine roads. Other popular camping sites include at least nine standing historic cabins. These cabins are widely dispersed throughout the Argus and Panamint mountains. The cabins are being evaluated as historic properties as well as recreational sites. Historic properties may be rehabilitated and interpreted for the visiting public. Outside of the popular camping areas, it is still possible to find isolated campsites as much as 5 miles away from anyone else.

Social Components: A few hardy individuals visit the SRMA, however, most people come here in small groups of family and friends. Certain areas (Great Falls Basin, the Slates and the Argus Range) are often frequented by locals from Trona and Homewood Canyon, who bring their families and buddies out on the weekends and after work to picnic, party, target shoot, collect rocks, and hunt. Many of these visitors use off-road vehicles and use the surrounding jeep trails to explore the area. Local equestrians take advantage of the many historic mining trails found in the area. Boy and Girl Scouts often use areas in Great Falls Basin, including Indian Joe Canyon, as well as Surprise Canyon in the Panamints, to learn primitive skills and the rudiments of camping and backpacking. The group sizes for special recreation permits start from 50 to 250 motorized users for each event. For the nonmotorized users we see approximately 200 participants.

Much of this area is too hot to use comfortably in summer (June, July, August, and September). Temperatures at this time of year can be in the triple digits. In October use picks up considerably, as the weather cools down, bringing many visitors from the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, but also from as far away as Santa Barbara and San Francisco. These visitors will typically pack up after work on Friday and drive more than 200 miles to stay through the weekend, leaving late Sunday, in time for work the next morning. These are often family outings, as well as opportunities to get away from it all, to relax and do something exciting and out of the ordinary with small groups of friends.

Many rock climbers, hikers, and backpackers use the area in winter time when climbing, hiking and backpacking areas in most of the Sierras are closed by snow.

As previously mentioned, the area supports many large group events each year, some of which are commercial, under special recreation permits, use these RMZ canyon trails and areas are as follows: Nadeau Road, Escape Trail, Isham Canyon Trail, Fish Canyon Trail, Jack Pot Canyon Trail, Jail Canyon Trail, Stone Canyon Trail, South Park Canyon Loop Trail, Pleasant Canyon Trail, and Goler Wash Road all taking a four-wheel drive vehicle to access most of the sites, Equestrian Trails Incorporated's Death Valley Equestrian Ride that has been going on for over 50 years starting in Ridgecrest and ending up in Death Valley, 3 annual American Motorcycle Association District 37 dual sport events, and Wilderness Torah Passover Celebrations in Surprise Canyon at Chris Wicht Camp.

Foreign visitors are becoming more common in Panamint Valley, particularly as they stop by to visit Surprise Canyon on their way to Death Valley National Park. Indeed, much of this SRMA functions as a principal gateway to Death Valley National Park. In the Panamints, many of its principal jeep trails, notably South Park and Goler Wash, lead directly into the Park and in the case of Goler, continue over the top of the Panamints to the floor of Death Valley. The attractions of this SRMA are perceived as roughly comparable to the Park's, within a freer and less-structured setting.

**Operational Components**: Visitor amenities are very minimal, consisting mostly of a network of primitive, unmaintained rugged off camber jeep trails (signed, open designated routes) and information, including maps, posted on kiosks or provided in brochures. Two iron fire rings with grills have been installed at the camping area at the base of the falls in Great Falls Basin. Otherwise, all camp sites are user-created and primitive, ranging in size from small (suitable for one or two vehicles only) to very large (suitable for multiple vehicles). There are many old mining cabins in the area that are frequently used as camp sites.

### **MANAGEMENT ACTIONS & ALLOWABLE USES**

## **Acres by Alternative on BLM Lands:**

No Action	Preferred Alternative	1	2	3	4
0	156,176	133,833	133,833	133,834	133,834

## For All RMZ's

**Recreation and Visitor Services Program**: Standard BLM two-week camping limits on public lands in one location are enforced. Vehicle use is limited to designated routes only.

**Other Programs**: Continue with natural resource multiple use management practices within the area. Allow all types of activities to occur within the area, except those with unacceptable safety concerns or degrade the environment. Develop recreation sites are withdrawn from mineral entry.

Manage all routes of travel as open, limited or closed, as designated in the Local TTMP.

Renewable energy development is not an allowable use in SRMAs due to the incompatibility with the values of the SRMA. Two exceptions to this management action are: 1) geothermal development is an allowable use if a geothermal-only DFA overlays the SRMA designation and complies with a "no surface occupancy" restriction; and, 2) in the Preferred Alternatives if a DRECP variance land designation overlays the SRMA, renewable energy may be allowed on a case-by-case basis if the proposed project is compatible with the SRMA values.

The Briggs Mine, a large cyanide-heap leach gold mine, is currently operating in the area. It is confined to a 2300- acre area along the west side of the Panamints between South Park and Goler canyons. A limestone quarry also exists on private lands with a stock pile on public lands at the mouth of Revenue Canyon in the Argus Range. Otherwise, there are no mines in opertation that impede recreational activities.

Most of this area, except for the Briggs Mine, has been proposed for VRM Class II. The objective of VRM Class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract attention. Some parts of Searles Valley within the SRMA have been proposed for VRM Class III. The objective of VRM Class III is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view. These VRM classes do not conflict with existing recreational uses.

The currently permitted Briggs mining and exploration area has been proposed for VRM Class IV. This land is not currently available for recreational use and is not expected to become available for such use in the future.

**Implementation Decisions:** An activity level plan would be developed to identify and designate current and future recreational opportunities, appropriate facilities to provide for and manage the proposed uses, parameters for streamlined Special Recreation Permitting of recreation events, staffing and funding needs, parameters for facility and road/trail maintenance, partnerships, possible recreation fee considerations, and an implementation schedule.

1. Limit vehicles to open designated routes and prevent new user-created routes from developing and proliferating.

- After consulting the area route inventory and drafting up travel and transportation management plan, restore closed routes, unauthorized vehicle play areas, and unauthorized hill climbs.
- 3. Preserve old historic (non-motorized) mining trails used for hiking and equestrian purposes as suchtype trails. These trails are historic in nature and should be maintained as historic resources in coordination with the Cultural Resources staff.
- 4. Protect National Register eligible properties, which have ethnographic significance to several of the tribes today. Prevent disturbance to existing cultural resources so research can be conducted and interpretative opportunities are not lost.
- 5. Protect historic cabin resources from unauthorized recreation and modification. Work with volunteers to record, stabilize, and interpret structures for visitors.
- 6. Prohibit target shooting in sensitive areas and where people typically congregate in large numbers to park or camp, i.e., the camping area at the base of the falls in Great Falls Basin, and at the Surprise Canyon trailhead area at Chris Wicht Camp.
- 7. Improve visitor services (maps, brochures, and kiosks), maintain signs, restoration sites, and continue to work with general and community volunteers to clean-up parking, trail head, and camping areas, particularly at Great Falls Basin and along Indian Ranch, Surprise Canyon, and Minnietta Mine roads.
- 8. Establish camping areas and install fire rings and picnic tables at decided areas.

## Mitigation:

- 1. Maintain through traffic motorized route network connectivity with roads and trails leading into and through the Panamint Valley SRMA.
- 2. Manage renewable energy development on adjacent and nearby lands to avoid traffic conflicts with visitors & permitted uses.

#### RMZ: Nadeau Road National Recreation Trail

Manage trail and its associated historic features as valuable historic resources open to appropriate recreational use and interpretation, consistent with law, regulation and policy. Limit vehicle use to designated routes only. Continue to enforce standard BLM two-week limits on camping on public lands in the same place. Require special use permits for commercial groups and groups larger than 50.

Other Programs (See above under "For All RMZ's"): This area has been proposed for a VRM Class II. The objective of VRM Class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract attention.

A ROW is associated with a short paved section of the Nadeau Road. This ROW provides access to an active limestone quarry on patented private land located near the mouth of Revenue Canyon. This ROW does not prevent public access to the remaining stretch of the Nadeau Road.

## Implementation Decisions (See above under "For All RMZ's"):

- 1. Nominate Trail for inclusion in the National Recreation Trail System.
- 2. Complete a cultural inventory of the trail and its associated trails and features.
- 3. Determine eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.
- 4. Develop RAMP for the RMZ.
- 5. Create a 300 foot buffer from development along the trail.
- Develop trail maintenance standards to preserve the trail's historic alignment and character. Identify constructed features requiring historic stabilization, i.e., the Chinese Wall at Slate Range Crossing.
- 7. Provide historically accurate interpretative kiosks and self-guided tour brochures.
- 8. Designate primitive camping areas as needed to protect the resources for which the trail has been designated.

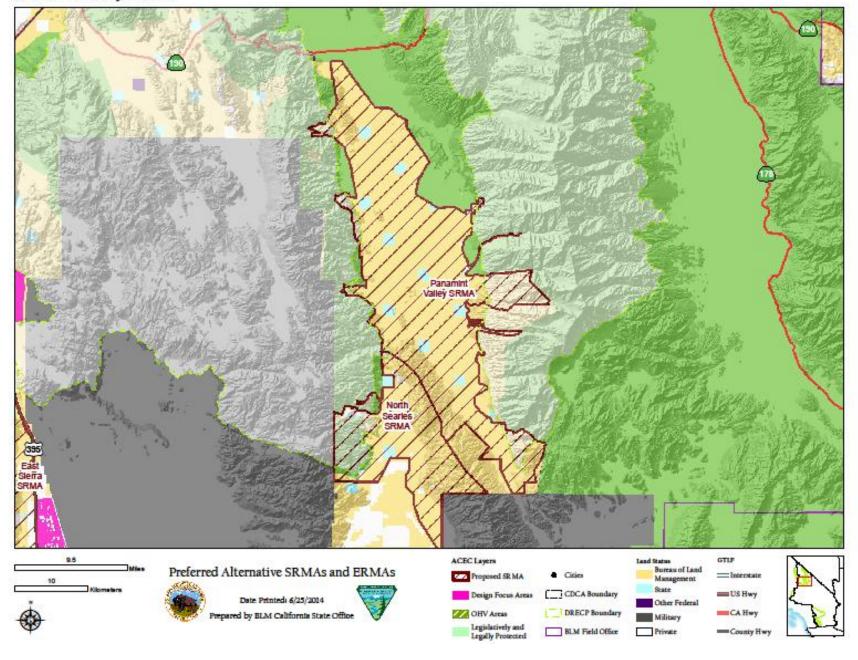
## **RMZ # 2-12:**

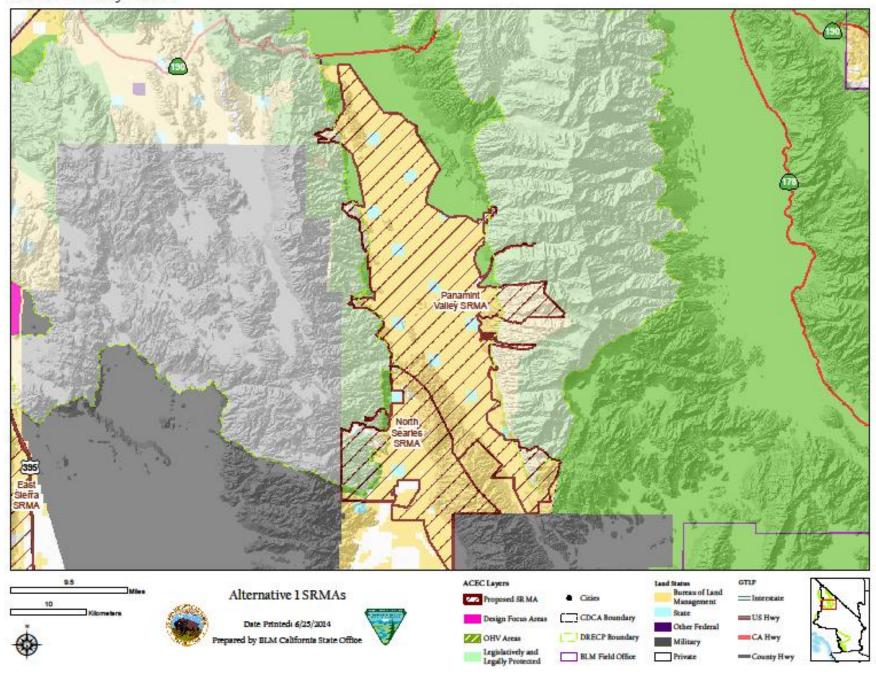
Manage trail and its associated historic features as valuable historic resources open to appropriate recreational use and interpretation, consistent with law, regulation and policy. Limit vehicle use to designated routes only. Continue to enforce standard BLM two-week limits on camping on public lands in the same place.

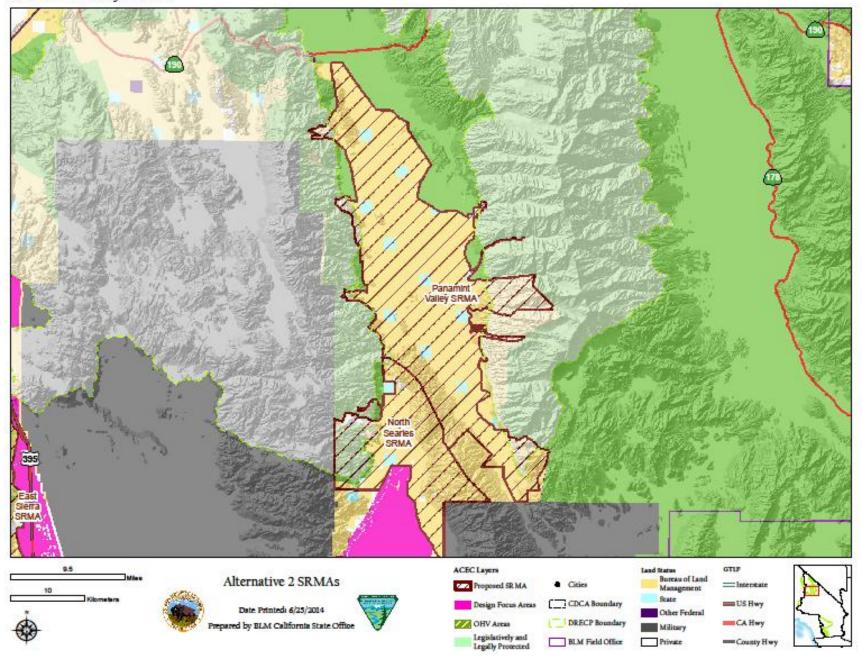
## Other Programs: (See above under "For All RMZ's")

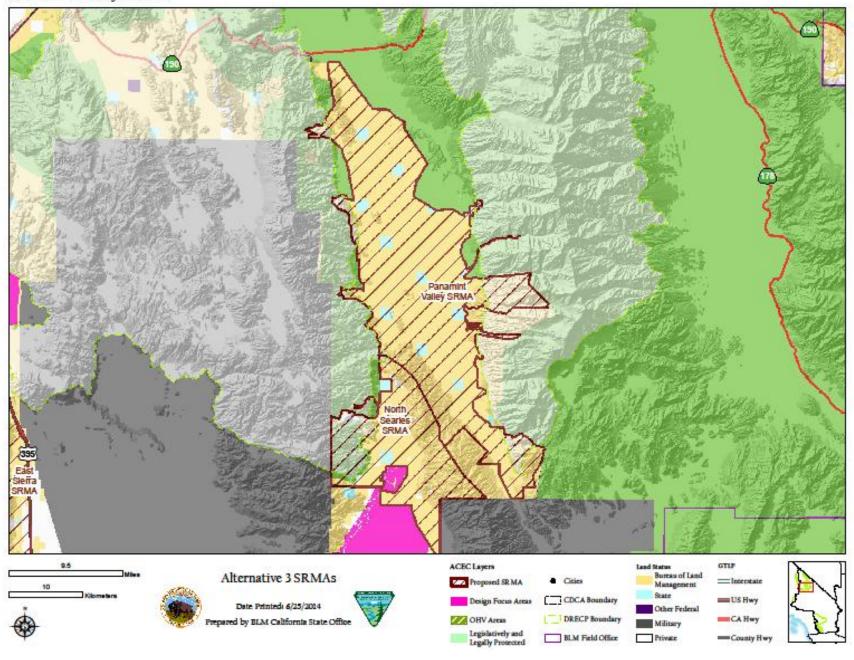
## Implementation Decisions: (See above under "For All RMZ's")

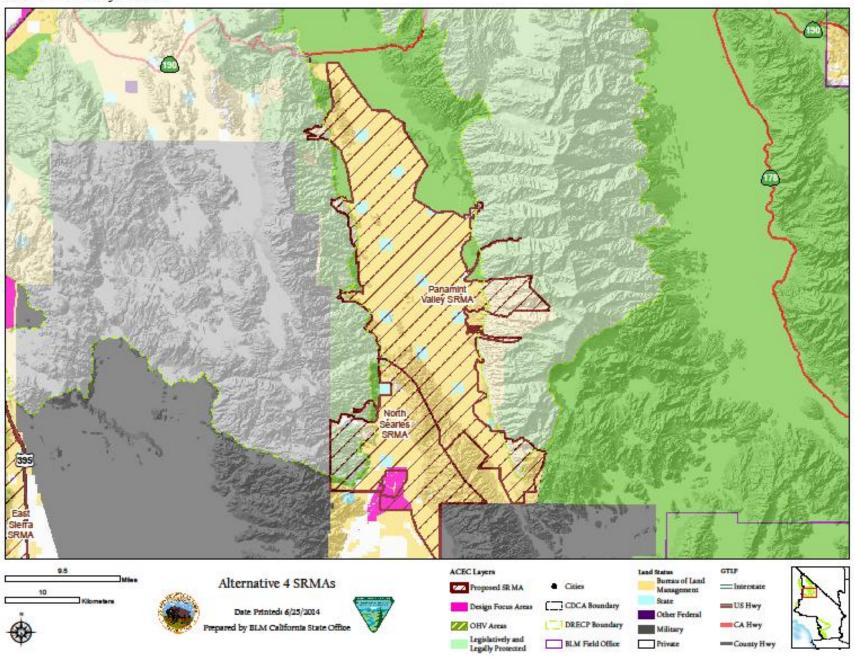
- 1. Manage for the sustainability of providing outstanding technical and semi-non-technical vehicle exploration opportunities.
- 2. Complete a cultural inventory of the trail and its associated trails and features.
- 3. Determine eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.
- 4. Create a 300 foot buffer from development along the trail when possible, buffer will be closer near to wilderness.
- 5. Provide historically accurate interpretative kiosks and self-guided tour brochures.
- 6. Designate primitive camping areas as needed to protect the resources for which the trail has been designated.











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